



Lake Erie / Lake St. Clair Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee

Established by the Department of Natural Resources to improve and maintain the fishery resources of Lake Erie, Lake St. Clair, and the St. Clair and Detroit Rivers through better communication and partnership.

Meeting Notes - Final Belle Isle Nature Zoo 176 Lakeside Drive, Detroit, MI 48207 March 7, 2019

Welcome and introductions (Frank Corl, Chair and Jim Francis, DNR)

- Everyone introduced themselves.
- Paul Bolling, a Detroit River and Lake Erie Charter Captain, is our newest member and was attending his first meeting.
- We lost Rene Michele, who recently passed away. Rene joined the group at our September 2018 meeting, representing Metro West Steelheaders.

Review the agenda and meeting minutes from September 2018 (All)

- No comments were received on the draft meeting notes from September 2018, so they have been accepted as final and posted on our web page.
- No changes were recommended to the meeting agenda.
- Feasibility study for a Boating Access Site at Belle Isle
This is an ongoing topic that we have been discussing during the past several meetings. The feasibility report was expected September 2018 but is still not available. However, based on feedback from the September 2018 meeting, Parks Division does not support developing a Boating Access Site on Belle Isle. They have acknowledged there is a need for more boating access in the upper Detroit River, but have not identified a solution.
 - We have been raising this concern with Parks since they began managing Belle Isle in 2013 and they have yet to identify a solution. Suggestions included bringing our concerns to Waterways Commission or setting up a meeting with the new DNR Director.

Watershed Assessment of Detroit River Nutrient Loads to Lake Erie (Lynn Vaccaro, U-M Water Center)

- The purpose of the study was to evaluate the nutrient connection between the Detroit River and Lake Erie. Although the levels of Total Phosphorous (TP) in Lake Erie have remained steady since 1980s, Dissolved Reactive Phosphorous (DRP) has been increasing since mid-1990s.
- The Maumee and Detroit rivers are the two biggest inputs, but they have different dynamics on nutrients. The Detroit River actually dilutes P and deflects the west basin blooms. P concentrations are much higher in the Maumee River and are the primary driver for west basin blooms. However, the Detroit River load is an important driver for hypoxia in the central basin.
- Over half (57%) of the TP in the Detroit River comes from Lake Huron, with another 10% coming from the waste water treatment plant in Detroit, which serves 3 million people. The plant has made huge improvements over the past 8 years, cutting loads by 40% since 2008, but remains a dominant source. The Thames River is on par with the treatment plant in terms of TP.
- There appear to be unmeasured Lake Huron loads (episodic sediment resuspensions) that monitoring is missing – so the load from Lake Huron is being underestimated.
- Still unknown why DRP is increasing
- From 2008-2016, there was a significant reduction in TP - but there is still a ways to go to reach target.
- On average, 20% of the TP load that enters Lake St Clair is retained in the lake long-term

- From 2013-2015, 39% of the TP loads originated from urban inputs (72% point sources, 14% treated CSO, 11% runoff, and 3% untreated CSO) and 61% from rural inputs (51% non-point sources).

Forecasting Harmful Algal Blooms to Help Lake Erie Users (Devin Gill, Cooperative Institute for Great Lakes Research)

- Devin's role is to facilitate effective communication and collaboration between researchers and members of the public who would benefit from the research.
- Algae are a natural part of a healthy lake system. However, some blue-green algae (Microcystis) in Lake Erie can produce a toxin (microcystin). This is referred to as a Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB). HABs occur throughout the Great Lakes and even on inland waters in Michigan.
- There are health risks associated with HABs and the toxin accumulates in gills, liver, and fat of fishes.
- There is a network of stations in the western basin that monitors microcystin levels. HAB tracker predicts the 5-day and season levels.
- https://www.glerl.noaa.gov/res/HABs_and_Hypoxia/habTracker.html
- Looking for faster method of getting results, so advisories can be issued in a better time frame.
- There have been improvements to the HAB tracker website based on direct feedback from stakeholders.

Fisheries Research Update (Todd Wills, MDNR-Fisheries)


- The non-charter walleye fishery in Lake Erie was excellent in 2018. Relative to the 2017 fishery, effort was up 39%, harvest was up 209%, and catch rates (0.67 walleye per hour) were the highest recorded (going back to 1975).
- Most walleye caught were in the 15-17 inch range from 2015 year class, but a few 2003 year class fish were still being caught.
- The walleye netting survey recorded higher catch per effort in 2018, as well as higher yearling catch. The Michigan age-0 walleye catch in trawls was very high, showing a similar trend as the multi-agency west basin survey – which was the highest on record.
- The yellow perch catch rate on Lake Erie returned to normal (2.3 perch per hour) after exceptional fisheries in 2016-17 (4.5 perch per hour).
- Michigan age-0 yellow perch bottom trawl survey catches were the highest since 2014 (when started).

Lunch—provided by DNR

Walleye regulations for the St. Clair – Detroit River System (Jim Francis, MDNR-Fisheries)

- This is a follow up to a topic that was initially presented and discussed at our September 2018 meeting about walleye regulations on the SCDRS.
- Tagging studies have shown that western basin Lake Erie walleye are the main source for walleye in the SCDRS.
 - An estimated 10-15% of walleye in Lake Erie migrate up the Detroit River each spring. With Lake Erie walleye population estimates ranging from 24-84 million walleye from 2006-20015, that translates to 3.6-12.6 million walleye a year running up the Detroit River. Many of these fish continue into Lake St Clair, up the St Clair River and into Lake Huron.
 - In a study in 2008-09, 25% of the Saginaw Bay walleye harvest consisted of fish that originated from Lake Erie.
- At least since 2000, the Thames River stock has been depressed and no longer contributes to the fishery because of poor recruitment.

- Looking back to 2003, the walleye abundance was nearing crises levels and drastic actions were taken in efforts to maintain a dwindling spawning stock.
- Regulations have changed a lot through the years on the SCDRS and Lake Erie. Currently, there are differences in size limits on the St Clair River and Lake St Clair and a different bag limit on the Detroit River – despite all being one stock of fish.
- And if we standardize bag limits across the system, it makes sense to standardize size limits too.
 - Based on creel data on Lake St Clair in 2016 and 2017, roughly a third of the walleye harvested were in the 13-15 inch size range. Under a proposed 15 inch minimum size limit, these fish would not be legal to harvest.
 - The only other location in the state where there is a minimum size limit less than 15 inches is in Saginaw Bay, where the stated management goal is to reduce walleye abundance.



**Michigan Walleye
Daily Bag Limit**

MI Quota (numbers of fish)	Daily Bag Limit
>108,364	6
108,364 – 96,958	5
96,957 – 85,551	4
85,550 – 74,144	3
74,143 – 62,737	2
<62,737	1

•Michigan thresholds based on sharing formula and OH thresholds

- **Bag Limit Proposal:** Uniform bag limit regulations for the St Clair River, Lake St Clair, Detroit River, and Lake Erie, with the bag limit tied to the Lake Erie quota table (currently 6 walleye). If walleye are reduced enough in Lake Erie that it triggers a bag limit reduction – that new bag limit would apply to the entire system.
- **Size Limit Proposal:** Establish a uniform minimum size limit of 15 inches in the St Clair River, Lake St Clair, Detroit River, and Lake Erie.
- **Discussion:**
 - Would the bag limit ever exceed 6? Given the high population of walleye, would we try and reduce numbers by increasing the bag limit? Based on current assessment information, there is no need to reduce walleye abundance. We are closely watching forage abundance, diet data, and growth as indications of too many walleye, but there are no indications at this time that a change is needed.
 - The size limit does not offer much protection for females, as only 4% of females are mature at 15 inches verses 1.5% at 13 inches.
 - Over the past 10 years, Michigan has harvested less than 50% of our Lake Erie quota but concern was expressed that if we added the entire SCDRS catch, it would likely put us over quota. The population estimates and quota apply only to Lake Erie proper. The methodology would not change – only the Lake Erie harvest would count against the quota.
 - Is it possible to reduce the size limit on Lake Erie, even if only for one year in 2020, to allow harvest of the 2018 year class? The argument is that there are a lot of released fish that are killed each year, so why not allow them to be kept. However, lowering the size limit would likely significantly increase harvest - which would potentially have to be offset with a bag limit reduction.

- Stan has been unofficially polling anglers at Cabela's and reported that 90% can live with going from 13 inches to 15 inches, especially if there was the potential to raise the bag limit to 7.
- Concern was raised about raising the size limit at the same time that the 2018 year class would be recruiting next year. A suggestion was made to evaluate recruitment on an annual basis and use that data to determine appropriate size limit.
- **Decision:**
 - There was consensus to accept the bag limit proposal stated above.
 - There was not consensus on the size limit proposal stated above. The majority of the group supported the proposal (19), but there were two dissenting votes. Because there was not consensus – the Chair makes a Consulting Decision: As the walleye are from a common system, St Clair River to the western basin of Lake Erie, the recommendation is to commonize harvest size limits across the system. However, with recruitment of the 2018 year class in mind, the St Clair River and Lake St Clair minimum size limit will remain 13 inches until the 2021 season when the minimum size limit will be 15 inches for the St Clair River, Lake St Clair, the Detroit River, and Michigan waters of Lake Erie.

Yellow Perch Regulations (Jim Francis, MDNR-Fisheries)

- On Lake Gogebic, special regulations went into effect April 1, 2012 – the yellow perch bag limit was lowered to 25 per day, with no more than 5 over 12 inches. There was no biological basis for the rule, it was purely a social concern.
- Last year, interest was expressed in expanding the “no more than 5 over 12 inches” regulation statewide. This support came from the Western Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Council, the Eastern Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Council, and adoption of a resolution at the MUCC annual convention.
- A fisheries assessment was conducted on Lake Gogebic in 2005 and 2017, and creel surveys were conducted 2005, 2016, and 2017.
 - There was no change in the size structure of the yellow perch population in assessments pre- and post-regulation change.
 - There is a strong inverse relationship between walleye and yellow perch abundance. It looks like walleye abundance plays a bigger role in structuring perch populations than fishing regulations.
 - Results from the creel surveys indicate that very few anglers even catch more than a handful of yellow perch. In 2005-06, only 15 interviews out of about 600 caught more than 10 perch.
 - There are enforceability concerns related to limiting the number of fish over a given size. Anglers can use scissors to trim the tail of a fish to get around the length limit.
- A number of members expressed concerns about reviewing regulations based on social versus biological science.
- Clarification was provided that the MUCC resolution read, “inland lakes and others where appropriate.” So it did not specifically include the Great Lakes.
- There was a question why the yellow perch reduction (from 50 to 25) did not include Lake Erie. Concern was expressed that the limit of 30 yellow perch daily in Ohio waters creates differences.
- **Decision:** There was consensus to oppose expanding the “no more than 5 over 12 inches” regulation statewide.

Regulations Process (Jim Felgenauer, Advisor)

- Concerns were raised that the DNR and NRC are setting regulations that are based on social concerns versus regulations being driven by scientific management.

- The statewide yellow perch bag limit is a recent example. Creel data showed that catch was not affecting perch populations; it was presented at the biologist conference twice and not supported; it came before the Warmwater Resources Steering Committee about 5 years ago and not supported; this topic was revisited numerous times with no support.
 - The yellow perch reduction was revisited this last time because exceptions were driving the discussion – social aspect.
 - An electronic survey went out to 300,000 anglers and only got 18,000 responses. About 60% of respondents agreed with a reduction to 25 perch. This data was summarized in a briefing to the NRC. But this creates management by “popular vote” for a statewide decision in absence of sound science.
- The proposed expansion of the Gogebic yellow perch regulation is the same issue – considering an unscientific regulation change.
 - **Action:** Frank will write a letter on behalf of the committee stating opposition to the proposal.
- Recent regulations are pushing too far to the social side. Jim encouraged members to take this issue back to their organizations, write letters, and show up at NRC meetings to voice concerns.

Law Enforcement Division Update (Sgt Szyska, CO Kiel, and CO Atkin, MDNR-Law Enforcement)

- LED shared their strategic plan.
- They have many positive contacts and use these as an opportunity for outreach. Only 2.5% of contacts result in enforcement actions.
- There has been an increase in staff – from 172 officers in 2013 to 244 in 2018. Although there has been an increase, there are projected retirements which will reduce that number. There are 83 counties and the goal is to have two officers per county – so there is still a long way to go. Because there are other staff in the total, like dispatchers, administration, and Great Lakes enforcement.
- Members were encouraged to take the online survey to provide feedback for LED.
- We reviewed the definition of possession limit, as some expressed concern about having fish at home in the freezer. CO Kiel made it clear that if you do not take over your limit – you do not have any concerns – emphasized using common sense. The main reason for the possession limit is to prevent commercialization.
- Although the question of possession relative to multiple licenses comes up annually – nothing has changed. An angler is allowed one possession limit, regardless of the number of licenses they possess. For example, on the Detroit River, an angler is allowed one possession limit – even if they have both an Ontario and Michigan fishing license. Furthermore, whenever an angler is fishing in Michigan waters – they must abide by the Michigan fishing regulations. So if they begin their day fishing in Ontario and keep a 13 inch walleye (legal by Ontario regulations), they would be in violation if they later came over and fished in Michigan waters – for possessing an undersized fish by Michigan laws.

Fisheries Division Update (Jim Francis, MDNR-Fisheries)

- Because the meeting was going long, only two updates were provided; 1) the Lake Erie Management Unit, Conversations and Coffee meeting is at the Waterford Shop on April 10; and 2) the Great Lakes Fishery Commission’s Lake Committee meetings were scheduled the week of March 25 in Ypsilanti.

Hoffman Memorial Access Site maintenance (Bob Neely)

- Because the discussion ran long on previous agenda topics – this will be tabled until the next meeting.

Committee Member Round Table (All)

- Friends of the Detroit River have their River Clean-up scheduled for April 27.
<http://www.detroitriver.org/assets/clean-up-flyer-2019.pdf>
- Ralph reported that anglers coming into the bait shops during ice fishing are just learning about the yellow perch reduction on Lake St Clair to 25 fish and they are not happy.
 - Mike agreed that people on the Michigan Sportman's Forum do not understand the regulation and are unhappy about the social nature.

Summary of meeting, future meeting topics and locations (Frank Corl)

- We ran out of time to cover a couple topics today, so Frank asked opinions about future meetings. Do we need more meetings or should we stick with two, but make them longer? A suggestion was made to keep the committee updated on topics on the NRC agenda and determine if a meeting is needed before fall. There was general support to move the meeting start time forward to 9 am.
- Ted raised concerns about commercial netting in southern Lake Huron having an impact on the whitefish fishing in the upper St Clair River. He suggested this as a future meeting topic.

Lake Erie / Lake St. Clair Citizens
Fishery Advisory Committee

Belle Isle Nature Zoo
March 7, 2019

Attendees:

Name	Affiliation
------	-------------

Advisors:

Matt Belletini	The Bass Federation (sub for Dave Reault)
Mary Bohling	Michigan Sea Grant
Dan Boileau	Downriver Walleye Federation
Paul Bolling	Charter Captain
Bob Burns	Friends of the Detroit River/Detroit Riverkeeper
Stan Bydlos	Perch Point Conservation Club
Frank Corl	Downriver Bass Association
Eric Diesing	Clinton River Watershed Council
Mike Eichbrecht	Charter Captain/Michigan Sportsman.com
Jim Felgenauer	St. Clair-Detroit River Sturgeon for Tomorrow
Jim Francis	MDNR-Fisheries
John Giszczak	Michigan Charter Boat Association
Eric Grajewski	Michigan Muskie Alliance/Guide
Ralph Kandt	Wholesale Bait Dealers
Dan Kimmel	Michigan B.A.S.S. Nation
Rick Kretschmar	National Professional Anglers Association
Ted Meyers	Shore Fisherman
Tim Muir	Lake St. Clair Walleye Association/MUCC
Bob Neely	Lake Erie/Monroe County
Terry Picard	Lake St Clair Walleye Association
Gerry Sickon	Michigan Steelhead and Salmon Fisherman's Association
Henry Walters	Michigan Charter Boat Association

Staff:

Nick Atkin	MDNR-Law Enforcement
Andrew Briggs	MDNR-Fisheries
Kris Kiel	MDNR-Law Enforcement
Todd Szyska	MDNR-Law Enforcement
Sara Thomas	MDNR-Fisheries
Todd Wills	MDNR-Fisheries

Guests:

Marcel Clark	Detroit Police
Devon Gill	Cooperative Institute for Great Lakes Research, NOAA
Blair Hughes	Bass Pro/Cabela's
Lynn Vaccaro	University of Michigan
Bruce Yinger	Downriver Bass Association
